

# THE MELODRAMA IN FRANCE FROM THE REVOLUTION TO THE BEGINNING OF ROMANTIC DRAMA, 1791-1830

CHAPTER I

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF UNIVERSITY STUDIES OF THE JOHNS  
HOPKINS UNIVERSITY IN CONFORMITY WITH THE REQUIRE-  
MENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

JAMES FREDERICK MASON

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BALTIMORE  
J. H. FURST COMPANY

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TO MY MOTHER.



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## PREFACE

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The word melodrama is used in the present monograph in the sense of popular tragedy. In France, modern popular drama did not arise until the time of the Revolution. Before 1789 the necessity of providing theaters for the populace was not recognized. The only form of amusement permitted the lower classes of society was pantomime. The *Comédie-Française*, like many another institution of the Monarchy, was a monopoly; it possessed not only the rights of performance for all the plays in the classical repertory, but also the power of keeping French tragedy and comedy off any other stage in Paris. Under such restraint any form of the popular drama was impossible, but after the declaration of the freedom of the theaters by the National Assembly in 1791, the condition of the *théâtres du Boulevard* was radically changed. Popular drama was then able to develop and become adequate to the needs of the people and suited to their intelligence. The *Comédie-Française* could no longer hamper the smaller theaters of the capital and prevent them from catering to the tastes of their audiences. The managers of these theaters recognized the fact that they could not successfully adopt or adapt classical tragedy or middle-class comedy, because the works of Racine, Corneille, Diderot, and Sedaine lacked certain characteristics absolutely essential to any play intended for the use of the humbler classes of society. Consequently they decided to retain the traditional pantomime and introduce into it those changes which the new conditions permitted. In a comparatively short time they developed from pantomime a type of popular drama so successful that it has continued, with but few and unimportant alterations, to the present day. Before the Revolution the 'fourth estate' with its lack of political power and its absence of education had found amusement in the buffoonery of Pierrot

and Cassandre, but after the events of 1789 it demanded something better than this puerile pantomime, which was scarcely above the puppet-shows of to-day. The farce of the pantomime was changed into a serious comedy, or tragedy with a happy ending, the stereotyped characters were dropped, and the coarseness and obscenity replaced by a naïve morality and sanguine optimism so often characteristic of a post-revolutionary period.

The first modifications in pantomime ante-date the Revolution by fifteen years, the period, 1791-1800, was one of transition during which the managers and authors of the various popular theaters in Paris carried on experiments in order to determine what was best suited to their audiences, and after 1800, with the restoration of peace and order, popular tragedy appeared in its definitive form under the name of melodrama.

Since its origin the melodrama has held full sway in all the popular theaters of France and England, as well as in those of other countries, and yet in spite of this long period of success, there has been very little change in form or content. The plots and the dialogues of the melodrama of the Empire are almost identical with those of to-day. The early melodramatists so well understood the psychology of their audiences that their successors have been unable to make any advances over those melodramas which from 1800 to 1830 made Pixérécourt and his fellow-authors popular heroes and which enriched the managers of the *Théâtre de la Gaîté* and the *Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique*. The early melodramatists, like their illustrious predecessors, Molière and Shakespeare, often combined the duties of stage-manager and author. Since the melodrama was intended solely for a popular audience, the question of style and psychological analysis was neglected in order that all the attention might be devoted to making the costumes and the scenery elaborate, the music attractive, and the plot long and interesting. For this reason the many melodramas which have come down to us from the time of the Empire and the Restoration do not bear reading. They were hastily and care-

lessly written by men of small learning and their momentary success was measured solely by the box-receipts. The absence of a literary *coterie* and the lack of subvention from the state made the theaters devoted to the melodrama wholly dependent upon popular approval for their very existence. The melodrama could advance only as the tastes of its audiences became more refined. For thirty years after its origin the material conditions were such that the melodrama was forced to remain exactly what it had been at the beginning, a popular, non-literary genre.

Although the early melodrama was outside the pale of literature, it exerted a most important influence upon the purely literary drama. The period extending from the Revolution to the production of *Henri III et sa cour* (1829) and *Hernani* (1830) is one of the most barren in the history of the *Comédie-Française*; comedy was barely kept alive by Duval, Picard, Colin d'Harleville, and Andrieux, and tragedy in the hands of servile imitators of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was moribund. Lemercier, recognizing the poverty of contemporary drama, had attempted a reform but being misled by his zeal to break too abruptly with the traditions of the *Comédie-Française*, he obtained no success. Even the patronage of a Napoleon was unable to keep classical tragedy alive, and night after night the *Comédie-Française* was empty. The popular theaters, on the contrary, were crowded, and their success so great that they attracted the attention of conservative newspapers, such as the *Journal des Débats* and the *Journal de Paris*. Geoffroy, the staunch classicist, who by his diatribes against the pseudo-classical drama of his time became one of the most hated dramatic critics of the Empire, was the first to recognize not only that the melodrama was perfectly adequate as popular drama, but also that it contained the germs of a revolution in French tragedy. Other critics who deplored the taste of an age which preferred the melodrama to Corneille and Racine accepted after some hesitation the views of Geoffroy. The upper classes, who began to



frequent the theaters of the Boulevards for the purpose of ridiculing the melodrama, soon found that these humble dramas were not wholly to be condemned. The ideas in the preface to *Cromwell* and their exemplification in *Henri III et sa cour* and *Hernani* were perfectly familiar to the Parisian long before that memorable twenty-fifth of February, 1830. The initial performance of *Pinto*, the fourth of Germinal, year VIII, had been a revelation to the conservatives of the *Comédie-Française*; in 1830, however, the point at issue was the propriety of the melodrama, hitherto confined to the small theaters, entering the *maison de Molière*. The success of *Hernani* marks the advent of the melodrama into literature. With this change of theater the genre itself underwent certain changes, verse was substituted for prose and *drame romantique* used instead of *mélodrame*. The latter term was too closely associated with the *boulevard de Crime* to appear upon the bills of the *Comédie-Française*, and the partisans of the new school were only too fearful lest their enemies should draw invidious comparisons between the plays of the Boulevards and romantic drama. In spite of this change of name, the dramas of Hugo and Dumas stand in close relationship to the melodrama, and *Hernani* marks the culmination rather than the beginning of the new genre. As M. Faguet has already pointed out,<sup>1</sup> romantic drama was already thirty years old when Dumas and Hugo achieved their success. Otherwise the period dating from *Hernani* to the *Burgraves* seems incredibly short. Romantic drama originated in the melodrama at the end of the Revolution and after remaining for thirty years in a popular form at the small Parisian theaters, became a literary genre with its entrance into the *Comédie-Française* in 1830.

Within recent years several critics have noted the importance and the influence of the early melodrama. Brunetière considered the plays of Pixérécourt a most important factor of pre-romantic drama. He says: "Si, d'ailleurs, j'ai cru devoir

<sup>1</sup> E. Faguet, *Propos de Théâtre*, vol. III, p. 225.

vous parler de Pixérécourt, c'est que le 'roi du mélodrame' a exercé, Messieurs, une bien plus grande influence qu'on ne croit. Non que ses mélodrames vaillent aujourd'hui grand-chose. Mais, d'abord, nul ne s'est inspiré plus que lui des souvenirs de l'histoire nationale. Et comme il les a choisis généralement atroces, il a ainsi habitué l'imagination populaire à la représentation effective de ce que le crime a de plus sanguinaire. La nature de ses succès en ce genre a même inquiété les pouvoirs publics, et nous lisons dans un Arrêté de la Commune de Paris sur la police des théâtres: 'Le grand principe de ne pas ensanglanter la scène est mis constamment en oubli et la scène ne cesse pas d'offrir le spectacle hideux du vol et de l'assassinat. Il est à craindre que la jeunesse, habituée à de telles représentations, ne s'enhardisse à les réaliser, et ne se livre à des désordres qui causeraient sa perte et le désespoir des familles. . . .' Je ne doute donc point pour ma part, que les faiseurs de mélodrames, en créant dans les esprits une disposition générale à goûter l'in vraisemblance, le merveilleux, et l'horrible, ne les aient accoutumés à ne pas s'étonner d'entendre plus tard des 'pas dans les murs'; à croire aux effets du 'poison des Borgia'; et à ne pas frémir que modérément des quatre incestes et des deux parricides de *la Tour de Nesle*." <sup>1</sup> M. Des Granges in his excellent work upon the history of dramatic criticism at the beginning of the nineteenth century has also called attention to the influence of the melodrama: "Il n'entre pas dans notre plan de faire l'histoire du mélodrame—histoire dont devrait se préoccuper, beaucoup plus que de Shakespeare ou de Goethe, toute enquête sur les origines du drame romantique." <sup>2</sup> M. Faguet has touched upon the subject of the melodrama several times. In one passage, especially, he outlines a tentative plan for a study of the melodrama. "Etudier Pixérécourt, Cuvelier, Caigniez, Ducange, et quelques autres, d'un peu plus près, comme précur-

<sup>1</sup> Brunetière, F., *les Epoques du Théâtre-Français*, p. 347.

<sup>2</sup> Des Granges, C-M., *Geoffroy et la critique dramatique sous le consulat et l'empire*, p. 402.

seurs des romantiques et surtout comme créateurs du goût public qui a rendu le théâtre romantique possible, ce qui expliquerait peut-être pourquoi le théâtre romantique a eu une carrière si courte, ayant été plutôt la fin éclatante de l'évolution d'un genre qu'un genre nouveau; étudier et débrouiller un peu cela serait singulièrement intéressant."<sup>1</sup> These citations alone are sufficient to show the importance of the melodrama and the necessity of a study of the subject.

In spite of these suggestions by such eminent critics no monograph or work on the history of the melodrama appeared until 1900 when M. Jules Marsan published in the *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* an article entitled *le Mélodrame et Guilbert de Pixérécourt*. The purpose of the present monograph is to study the history of the melodrama in greater detail than was possible in the brief article of M. Marsan.

The most important sources of information have been the melodramas themselves, most of which are to be found in pamphlet form in the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal of Paris. The more successful of the early melodramas may also be found in two collections *Chefs-d'œuvre du répertoire des mélodrames joués à différens théâtres* published in thirty volumes in 1825 and the *Théâtre choisi de Guilbert de Pixérécourt* published in four volumes at Nancy in 1841-43. Another invaluable source has been the newspapers of the period, especially the *Journal des Débats*, the *Journal de Paris*, and the many short-lived theatrical reviews and almanachs. In my use of the newspapers of the period I have followed the excellent suggestion of M. des Granges who, in both his *Geoffroy et la critique dramatique sous le consulat et l'empire* and *la Presse littéraire sous la restauration*, has clearly demonstrated the importance of the newspapers at the beginning of the nineteenth century as sources for the literary history of the period.<sup>2</sup> Besides my indebtedness to the more

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> Des Granges, C-M., *Geoffroy et la critique dramatique sous le consulat et l'empire*, p. 402.



general treatises of MM. Brunetière, Faguet, and Lanson, I have found most valuable the previously mentioned works of M. Des Granges. The suggestive article of M. Marsan has been indispensable. For the history of the small theaters of Paris, M. Albert's *les Théâtres de la foire* and *les Théâtres des boulevards* have proved very useful. For questions concerning the romantic drama, constant reference has been made to the recent work of M. Nebout, *le Drame romantique* and to MM. Paul et Victor Glachant's *Théâtre de Victor Hugo*. For Dumas, père, and his relation to the melodrama some use has been made of M. Parigot's *le Drame d'Alexandre Dumas*. The period discussed in this monograph has been limited by 1791, the date of the freedom of the theaters, and 1830, the date of *Hernani*.



## CHAPTER I.

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The history of the popular theaters of Paris during the eighteenth century is one long-continued struggle for freedom. Since the aristocracy and the middle classes had been able to express themselves through certain forms of the drama, the people asked the right to do the same. Classical tragedy, with its refinement and classical allusions, meant nothing to those who could hardly read. The situations and the problems of the *Cid* and *Phèdre* were too remote from the interests of those who stormed the Bastille. "Nos plus belles tragédies en France n'intéressent pas le peuple," wrote Mme. de Staël.<sup>1</sup> The *drame bourgeois* was even more unpopular, Diderot in his attempt to bring the drama nearer to every-day life, robbed the stage of much that was dear to the heart of the people. The audiences of the small theaters, even when they failed to comprehend fully the *style noble*, preferred its majesty and sonority to the triteness of the conversation in *le Père de famille* and *le Fils naturel*. The pomp and ceremony of royalty held the attention of a popular audience much more than Mercier's vinegar merchant. They considered the theater as an escape from the tedium and barrenness of ordinary life, which was far too prosaic to be reproduced on the stage. Spectacular display and an exciting plot followed by a happy ending are indispensable elements to any popular drama and all these were to be found in pantomime. Consequently, for the greater part of the eighteenth century, this form of dramatic amusement satisfied the people. When they grew fonder of the theater and more regular in attendance, they tired of the general similarity and the constant repetitions of these pantomimes. The efforts of the small theaters to meet this demand for something better

<sup>1</sup> *De l'Allemagne*, II, 15 (de l'art dramatique).



began the evolution of pantomime which ended in the melodrama.

The purpose of the present chapter is twofold: first, to show the evolution of the old type of pantomime, through the stages of *pantomime historique ou romanesque* and *pantomime dialoguée*; secondly, to trace the history of the word *mélodrame* from its original meaning of 'opera' in general through *scène lyrique* to 'pantomime with dialogue.'

### 1. PANTOMIME WITH DIALOGUE.

When Parliament in 1548 took away from the Confrères de la Passion the right to give mystery plays, France lost the only popular national theater she has ever possessed. During the Renaissance the partisans of the foreign tragedy imported from Italy urged the king to take drastic measures to stifle popular drama, because they feared lest this native product should develop into a formidable rival of classical tragedy. When the *Hôtel de Bourgogne* was added to Molière's troupe in 1680 and the combined troupes invested with the exclusive privilege of giving plays in Paris, popular drama was effectively suppressed for a hundred years. During this century the *Comédie-Française* and the small theaters were engaged in a battle royal which ended in the complete victory of the latter in 1791. The actors of the King were inconsistent, cruel, and unjust toward their humble rivals. At first the censorship was rigid and a theater which ventured to give anything besides pantomime and puppet-shows met with harsh treatment. A certain Bertrand, for example, who in 1690 substituted actors of flesh and blood for his marionettes, saw his theater promptly demolished by the police. Just before the Revolution, however, when the privileged troupes, such as those of the *Comédie-Française* and the *Opéra*, needed funds, the *Théâtre de la Gaîté* and the *Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique* were sometimes able to bribe the authorities into allowing them a short scene of dialogue or even a comedy, but the demands for money

soon became so frequent and exorbitant that they were forced to give up the struggle and return to pantomime and puppet-shows enlivened by acrobats, tight rope walkers, and performing animals.

The *forains*, as the actors of these small theaters which sprang from the *théâtre de la foire* were called, met with much success during the eighteenth century in spite of the attacks of their powerful rivals. Men of no less importance and ability than Lesage and Piron became playwrights for these mimes of the Boulevards. Arlequin figured in all possible rôles from *Arlequin invisible* and *Arlequin amoureux* to *Arlequin défenseur d'Homère*.<sup>1</sup> The pantomimes contained in the ten-volume edition of *le Théâtre de la foire*, published in 1737, at Paris, by Lesage and d'Orneval, show the wide range of subjects presented. The *forains* were so ingenious that they even used to good advantage some of the difficulties which confronted them. "On devra à leur (les acteurs forains) entêtement, à leur ingénieuse tactique, à leur esprit inventif, nos modernes théâtres des boulevards, et de nouveaux genres dramatiques, tels que le vaudeville, le monologue, la pantomime, la revue, d'autres choses encore."<sup>2</sup> For example, when all dialogue or monologue was prohibited, necessity suggested *pièces à écriteaux*, in which the audience instead of listening to speeches spoken by the actors read them from placards suspended over their heads. This form of entertainment became famous with Lesage's *Arlequin, roi de Serendib*, (1713). When only monologue was allowed, Piron amused all Paris with his three act monologue-comedy, *Deucalion Arlequin*, (1722). As the *forains* grew more successful, they began to erect permanent wooden structures. Fashion found its way to the *foire* which finally settled on the Boulevard du Temple. Geoffroy, replying to the critics who took him to task for devoting too much attention to the small theaters, remarked upon this change in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Le Théâtre de la foire*, Maurice Drach, Paris, 1889.

<sup>2</sup> Albert, M., *les Théâtre de la foire*, p. 25.

the audiences: "Il n'est pas inutile d'observer que ces théâtres (ceux de Nicolet et d'Audinot) voués à la farce et destinés aux dernières classes du peuple, ont été dans les dernières années de la monarchie française, les théâtres de la bonne compagnie et du bon ton."<sup>1</sup> Even the Court desired to see these humble amusements and ordered Audinot, the manager of the *Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique* to bring his troupe of child-actors, whom he had recently substituted for marionettes, to Choisy. The *Mémoires de Bachaumont* for the year 1772 contain an interesting account of this performance in the presence of the king. "En 1772, madame du Barry qui cherchait tous les moyens de distraire le roi, que l'ennui gagnait aisément avait imaginé de faire venir Audinot jouer à Choisy, avec ses petits enfants. C'est la première fois que ce directeur forain passait devant S. M. On a donné d'abord: *Il n'y a plus d'enfants*, petite comédie en prose d'un sieur Nougaret, où il y a de la naïveté, mais des scènes d'une morale peu épurée, puis la *Guinguette*, ambigu-comique de M. Plainchesne, image riante et spirituelle de ce qui se passe dans les tavernes, un joli Teniers. On a fini par le *Chat botté*, ballet pantomime du sieur Arnould; on n'a pas même oublié la Fricassée, contredanse très polissonne. Madame du Barry s'amusait infiniment, et riait à gorge déployée, le roi souriait quelquefois."<sup>2</sup> After this visit Audinot received permission to use the title, *Théâtre des comédiens de bois de Sa Majesté*. *Comédiens de bois* could hardly be taken literally but then Audinot did not dare to call the attention of the *Comédie-Française* and the *Opéra* to the fact that he had discarded his marionettes. In the same year Audinot's rival, Nicolet, was allowed to add to the dignity of his acrobats and tight rope walkers by the use of the name, *Spectacle des grands danseurs et sauteurs du roy*. This popularity and prominence of the theaters of Audinot and Nicolet

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Débats*, June 18, 1803.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Brazier, N., *Chroniques des petits théâtres de Paris* (reprint of d'Heylli), vol. I, p. 59.

troubled the *Comédie-Française*, which spent much time in devising methods of persecuting the two managers.

The status of the small Parisian theaters upon the eve of the Revolution was somewhat as follows. Nicolet at the *Théâtre des grands danseurs et sauteurs du roy* was giving acrobatic and tight-rope performances and a few short comedies. The *Opéra*, which in 1784 had been placed in control of the small theaters and dance-halls of the capital, in order to increase its income, allowed Nicolet, upon the payment of 24,000 *livres*, almost as much liberty as he desired. The *Comédie-Française*, however, insisted that the *Opéra* should not permit him to touch the repertory and that his comedies should not bear too striking a resemblance to those given at the *Théâtre-Français*. The royal players even encouraged indecency and licentiousness, in order that the difference between their own performances and those on the Boulevards might be more marked.<sup>1</sup> In their desire to degrade and humiliate Nicolet and his troupe, they even demanded that a tight rope and a spring-board should always be on the stage to keep before the minds of the audience the humble origin of the theater. Sallé at the *Théâtre des Associés* enjoyed even more liberty than Nicolet and could give the plays of Mercier and those of amateur authors too timid to expose themselves to ridicule at the *Comédie-Française*. Earlier, Sallé had gained some notoriety by his farcical presentations of well-known plays. "Pendant un temps, on permettait aux petits spectacles de donner des pièces du répertoire du Théâtre-Français, mais en changeant les titres, et en les faisant précéder de marionnettes. Aussi, *Zaïre* était appelée le *Grand-Turc mis à mort* . . . le Père de famille s'appelait *les Embarras du ménage*; *Beverly, la Cruelle passion du jeu*." <sup>2</sup> At the *Beaujolais* child-actors, who had replaced the original marionnettes, acted a pantomime, while adults recited the accompanying dialogue from the wings.

<sup>1</sup> Brazier, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Brazier, *op. cit.*, p. 88.



One of the earliest translations of Sheridan's *Rivals* was performed in this manner. At the *Délassements-Comiques* the authorities allowed only three actors to perform and even these three were required to act behind a gauze curtain. At the other small theaters, there were similar restrictions quite as unjust and unreasonable as those at the *Beaujolais* and the *Délassements-Comiques*. The most successful and the best-known of all these theaters, the *Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique*, formerly the *Théâtre des comédiens de bois de Sa Majesté*, avoided such humiliating restrictions by confining itself to pantomime. A contemporary critic has nothing but praise for the performances at this theater: "Ses plus beaux succès sont dus à la pantomime; nulle part on n'approche de l'ensemble et de la perfection avec laquelle on les exécute chez Audinot. L'orchestre y est estimé, la dance n'y est pas mauvaise; quelques acteurs y sont fort bons."<sup>1</sup> The enterprise of Audinot and his helpers soon began to make innovations in these pantomimes which finally lead to a new genre, the melodrama.

Pantomime has always flourished in Romance countries since the time of Augustus when Maecenas' freedman, Bathyllus, became the most popular mine of all Rome, and since the reign of Nero, when the Emperor himself was proud of his histrionic abilities in pantomime. Roman actors of the Empire even attempted to act in pantomime the plays of Sophocles and Euripides to the accompaniment of a chorus. France had inherited the love of pantomime from Rome and had received from Italy the original form of pantomime, which consisted of a slight plot with much improvisation and buffoonery and the stereotyped characters of Arlequin, Gilles, Colombine, and Cassandre. The acting was accompanied throughout by instrumental music which frequently consisted of popular airs. The plots were entirely lacking in novelty and invention; Cassandre, after changing her affection from Gilles to Arlequin, finally returns

<sup>1</sup> *Almanach général de tous les spectacles, année 1791*, p. 172 (the plays cited were given in 1790).

to her first lover. Since the popularity of this Italian pantomime, after having endured for many years, was now beginning to wane, the small theaters found it necessary to add new features to this entertainment in order to hold the attention of their audiences.

Audinot, of the *Ambigu-Comique*, was the first to begin to change the character of this Italian pantomime. Being possessed with most of the qualities essential to a theatrical manager, he was keenly alert to a change of taste in his audiences and anxious to cater to their love of novelty. The manner in which he became a theatrical director shows the temper of the man. He began his career as a tenor at the Italian Opera in Paris, but angered at the refusal of his fellow-singers to produce his opera, *le Tonnelier*, he resigned his position and sought vengeance upon his former associates by establishing a puppet-show in which all the puppets were easily recognized caricatures of those who had failed to praise his work. The Parisians with their love of satire appreciated this trick of Audinot, whose puppet-show at once sprang into popularity. After the novelty of these caricatures had worn off, Audinot introduced child-actors who in turn gave way to adults and then he began to give regular pantomimes of the Italian type. Audinot, possessing little ability as an author, soon associated with himself, a young man called Arnould. Jean François Mussot, later known under the name of Arnould, had begun the study of law in compliance with the wishes of his family, but, the temptation of the stage proving too strong, he ran away and joined the troupe of the Prince de Condé, of which Audinot was director. Like Poquelin, Mussot took a pseudonym to avoid offending the family. Audinot was impressed by the ability of the young Arnould and later on urged him to join his troupe at the *Ambigu-Comique*. After becoming a member of Audinot's company, Arnould began writing pantomimes in the old style, such as *le Chat botté* (1770), *le Villageois clair-voyant* (1771), and short comedies mixed with vaudeville. In 1778, he won great success with *la Complainte de Barmécides*,

a parody of one of La Harpe's tragedies. In 1775 he became associate manager to Audinot and after that wrote the majority of the pantomimes played at the *Ambigu-Comique*.

The first important change in pantomime occurred in 1779 when Arnould in an attempt to vary the monotony of the ordinary performance wrote an historical pantomime entitled *les quatre Fils Aymon*. In the preface to this work, the author holds up to ridicule the old Italian Pantomime then in vogue in Paris. "Il est de ces pantomimes sublimes qui, comme l'éternité, n'ont ni commencement ni fin, et dont l'action principale consiste dans une vingtaine de coups de sifflet qui font mouvoir à vue autant de machines. La beauté et la multiplicité des décorations, l'éclat des habits, une multitude innombrable d'incidens entassés les uns sur les autres; une musique bruyante et sans cesse, une infinité de gestes souvent inintelligibles, ou qui n'expriment rien, une quantité de ballets bien ou mal amenés, n'importe; voilà ce qu'on appelle du délicieux, du merveilleux, du, etc.: on y court, on s'y porte en foule, on s'y extasie, et l'on finit par ce cri devenu si commun; bravo! bravissimo! Si quelque personne, moins enthousiaste, s'avise d'en demander la raison, on lui répond brusquement qu'on n'en sait trop rien; mais, qu'à tout prendre, c'est la plus belle chose du monde."<sup>1</sup> In order to avoid this inanity, Arnould took as the subject of his plot, not the foolish intrigues of Pierrot and Cassandre, but an incident drawn from the early history of France. With some display of erudition he quotes his source, the *Histoire des quatre fils Aymon très-nobles et très-vailants chevaliers* and asks indulgence for certain changes which <sup>he</sup> found necessary to make in order to 'conformer aux bienséances théâtrales.' The action begins with the arrival of Charlemagne at the Château de Montauban and his preparations for taking vengeance upon the sons of Aymon for the murder of his nephew Berthelot. The first scenes are en-

<sup>1</sup> A copy of the original pantomime is at the Bibliothèque Nationale, but, being bound in a collection of eighteenth century operas (Recueil d'opéras français, Fb 19551-62), it is not noted in the catalogue.

livened by fights, retreats, and the taking of prisoners on both sides. Roland unsuccessfully attempts to bring about a reconciliation and the battle continues until the climax is reached in the last scene when Charlemagne, about to behead Claire, sees her husband, Regnaud, on the point of killing Roland. The old emperor at once declares a general amnesty and thereby saves the hero of Roncevaux. The pantomime concludes with a *divertissement* consisting of ballets and military drills, an ending familiar to the audiences of the Boulevard. The serious plot of *les quatre Fils Aymon* marks a great advance in pantomime, yet we must not be misled by Arnould's preface into believing his pantomime entirely different from that of his predecessors. In this preface of Arnould, as in those which were written forty years later, there is a discrepancy between theory and practice. The specious title, *pantomime historique*, is almost a misnomer, for, with the exception of the somewhat doubtful historical personages, all is pure fiction and the interest of the audience was probably centered on the stage-battles, the dances, the elaborate staging and costumes rather than the episode of national history.<sup>1</sup> Arnould did not make any great advance in *les quatre Fils Aymon*, but he opened the way for the use of any serious subject as the plot of a pantomime. The idea of seeking dramatic material in the history of France was perhaps suggested by De Belloy's patriotic play, *le Siège de Calais* (1765). Arnould's next historical pantomime, *Jérusalem délivrée ou Renaud et Armide*, based upon episodes of Tasso's poem, was given at the *Ambigu-Comique* in the same year as *les quatre Fils Aymon*. These historical pantomimes possessed one serious defect; the plots, being so long and complicated, were often unintelligible to the spectators, who, to understand the action, were forced to rely upon the printed programmes. When, as in the case of modern opera, the attention of the audience is divided between the stage and the libretto, the dramatic interest is always lessened. At the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Albert, M., *les Théâtres de la foire* (Paris, 1900), p. 272.



*Ambigu-Comique* before the Revolution this annoyance of learning the plot from the programme was much greater than it would be at present, because many of the audience at that time did not read with any great fluency.

To remedy this defect of historical pantomime, Audinot, probably with the aid of Arnould, wrote *Dorothée*, a *pantomime à spectacle*, in which not only was the plot extremely simple, but any confusion was avoided by the use of printed signs similar to the *écriteaux* of the eighteenth century *théâtre de la foire*.<sup>1</sup> With *Dorothée* the sentimental element entered pantomime. The beginning of the few lines of poetry on the title-page suggests the nature of the subject, and shows that the influence of the 'homme sensible' had penetrated even to the small Parisian theaters.

"O vous, sensibles coeurs, qui ne rougisiez pas  
D'écouter la Nature, et de verser des larmes."

Some of the lines in the preface, which is addressed to 'mothers and young women,' continues in the same strain with the addition of a lofty moral tone so characteristic of the future melodrama.

"L'amour récompensé, la vertu triomphante,  
Dans les bras de l'époux, son épouse innocente  
Et son enfant chère, le bonheur de tous deux,  
Gage de leur hymen, et de leur foi constante,  
Par une vive émotion,  
Je vois vos âmes s'attendrir  
Les pleurs de la compassion  
Le cri du coeur, la voix de la Nature."

Since no mention is made of a source for the plot of *Dorothée*, Audinot and Arnould apparently invented the pathetic story of the heroine. The pantomime begins with a scene of rural festivity in the midst of which Dorothée repulses the advances made to her by the mayor of the village. The indignant mayor brings forward a false accusation against the girl and causes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 3.

her to be put in prison. The second act takes place in prison where the mayor visits the girl and endeavors to win her heart. At the beginning of the third act the unfortunate Dorothée is seen tied to a stake bearing the inscription;

“La belle Dorothée  
Au feu sera jetée  
Si la valeur d'un chevalier loyal  
Ne la recourt de ce brazier fatal.”

The mayor at the head of a company of soldiers appears with a flag in his hand bearing these words,

Je jure que de Dorothée  
Sa perte est méritée.  
Si quelque audacieux  
Veut prendre sa querelle  
Et combattre pour elle,  
Qu'il s'offre à l'instant à mes yeux.”

The ‘preux chevalier’ in the person of Dunois arrives as opportunely as the Knight of the Swan, kills one of the soldiers, and rescues the heroine who is about to be consumed by the flames. At this critical moment Dorothée’s husband, who is the general of the regiment stationed in the village, rushes upon the scene, and, when he has heard the story of the attempted crime of the mayor, orders his immediate punishment and bursts into tears of gratitude, as he thanks the hero. The pantomime ends with dancing and merry-making. The story of *Dorothée*, although much simpler than that of *les quatre Fils Aymon*, was still too complicated for pantomime and the dumb acting of the people on the stage had to be supplemented by the use of inscribed banners. *Dorothée*, however, marks an important step in the development of pantomime because of its naturalness and its pathos.

The problem of making a serious pantomime perfectly intelligible to the audience without recourse to either programme or *écriteaux* was finally solved by Arnould in his famous *Maréchal-des-logis*, the plot of which was based, not upon

national history or a fictitious episode, but an incident familiar to the majority of the people who frequented the small theaters. Several newspapers of the time had brought into renown a young quarter-master, because of the heroism which he had displayed in rescuing a girl from robbers.<sup>1</sup> Brazier has given us an interesting account of the pantomime written about this courageous act. "Mais une pantomime qui obtint un de ces succès comme on en voit peu, était le *Maréchal-des-logis*. Une aventure arrivée dans la forêt de Villers-Cotterets, en avait fourni le sujet. Une jeune et jolie fille la traversait seule, quand elle fut arrêtée par deux voleurs, qui, après lui avoir pris tout ce qu'elle possédait, la garottèrent à un arbre, pour lui faire sans doute souffrir de plus affreux traitements . . . ; mais, par bonheur, un brave maréchal-des-logis des dragons de la reine, qui se rendait en semestre, ayant entendu les cris de la victime, courut à elle, mit les voleurs en fuite, détacha la jeune fille, et la reconduisit respectueusement à ses parents. Cette belle action insérée dans toutes les gazettes, retentit jusqu'à la cour. La reine voulut voir son dragon, on le lui présenta; il reçut de Marie-Antoinette un accueil très touchant, et une somme avec laquelle il acheta son congé et se maria avec la charmante fille qu'il avait sauvée par son courage. Tout Paris alla verser des larmes au *Maréchal-des-logis*, je crois même que le héros assista en uniforme à plusieurs représentations."<sup>2</sup> The superiority of this pantomime over its predecessors is obvious; its simplicity, directness, and morality made it quite suitable to a popular audience. M. de Monthyon, founder of the well-known 'prix Monthyon,' is said to have written a letter to the managers of the *Ambigu-Comique*, commending them for the lofty moral tone of this pantomime.<sup>3</sup> Arnould had at last succeeded in carrying on the plot of a pantomime without recourse to extraneous means.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Le Journal historique et politique*, vol. xxiv, p. 514, and *le Journal encyclopédique*, vol. iv, p. 528.

<sup>2</sup> Brazier, N., *Chroniques des petits théâtres de Paris*, vol. I, p. 63-64.

<sup>3</sup> *Histoire de l'Ambigu-Comique*, p. 43; Barbier in the *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes* gives the name of E. Deligny as the author.

Arnould however was too ambitious to be satisfied with the success of the *Maréchal-des-logis* and next conceived the idea of transferring the scene of action from France to some distant land. *L'Héroïne américaine* brought before the audience of the *Ambigu-Comique* a foreign country with extraordinary costumes and peculiar usages. Arnould's quasi-pedantic manner again appears in the preface where, as in the case of *les quatre Fils Aymon*, he cites as his source, *l'Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, and also explains that his departures from historical fact were 'nécessités par l'action théâtrale.' The theater-goers of the Boulevard had probably never heard of this historical work with such a long title and, provided they were amused, cared little as to whether the plot was based upon fact or fancy. The main outlines of the story contained many dramatic possibilities and the ending is not as patent as in *Dorothée* and the *Maréchal-des-logis*. The story centers around the ignoble treatment of a young Indian girl at the hands of an Englishman. Two Englishmen, who are cruising among the West Indies in quest of slaves, are suddenly attacked by the natives and one is killed and the other taken prisoner. An Indian girl aids the captured man to escape and in return for this noble action is sold by him as a slave. Just as the girl is being taken to the slave ship, the chief of the tribe arrives and rescues her from her captors. The pantomime ends with the departure of the Englishman, 'le coeur déchiré par ses remords' and with a proud gesture on the part of the chieftain, which is intended, according to the programme, to signify that he 'voue une haine éternelle à lui (l'Anglais) et à sa nation.' The exotic details of *L'Héroïne américaine* were apparently received with great favor because in the same year Arnould wrote a similar work entitled *la Mort du Capitaine Cook*. Even Mérimée could hardly have surpassed the wealth of local color in this pantomime, which, with its realistic and striking costumes and scenery, eclipsed anything the Boulevard had seen. France had made the ac-



quaintance of the courageous captain and read the account of his death in Demeunier's translation, which under the title of *le Troisième Voyage de Cook* had been published in 1785, the year before Arnould wrote his pantomime. "On s'est proposé," Arnould writes in his preface, "d'amener sur la scène un spectacle vraiment neuf et singulier, et qui offre en même temps quelque intérêt. La mort tragique du capitaine Cook, assassiné par les Insulaires qu'il combloit de bienfaits, a paru réunir tous ces avantages . . . et l'on sent bien que les convenances théâtrales ne nous ont pas toujours permis de suivre la vérité à la rigueur . . . Nous l'avons rendue le mieux qu'il nous a été possible, dans le costume, les mœurs, les danses des sauvages de la mer du sud." The programme of this pantomime is filled with native words and descriptions of the native costumes and customs. "La scène est dans l'Ile d'O-Why-E." The leaders of the savage tribes bear strange names such as Oki, Etoë, and Emaï, small boats are called *pirogues*, the cemetery, *moraï*, and the volcano, which furnishes the background of the scene is always spoken of as 'la montagne brûlante.' The natives rub noses as a sign of greeting, all the details of their funeral ceremonies are carefully noted and the costumes described as follows: "jeunes sauvages à demi-nus, les cheveux flottants, bouclés, et peints de différentes couleurs, la tête chargée de grains de verre, de plumes rouges et de très beaux coquillages." The plot resembles that of *l'Héroïne américaine*. Captain Cook is brutally murdered by some of the savage chieftains, whom he had treated very kindly. In one important particular *la Mort du Capitaine Cook* differs from its predecessors, the ending is unhappy. The audiences of the Boulevard excused this in *la Mort du Capitaine Cook*, because of the many other attractions which it offered, but before the Revolution, as well as after, they preferred a happy ending with the punishment of vice and the reward of virtue.

From these few pantomimes we may gain some idea of Arnould's activity and of his importance in the development

of the genre from a nonsensical farce into a serious drama. Among the various types of pantomime which he invented, the most important are the historical as represented by *les quatre Fils Aymon*, the romanesque by *Dorothée*, the contemporary by *le Maréchal-des-logis* and the exotic by *la Mort du Capitaine Cook*. Arnould was a prolific writer and has left us many examples of each type. *L'Homme au masque de fer* was a very successful historical pantomime concerning the man in the iron mask. Arnould supposes this personage, whose identity has so troubled historians, to be the Comte de Vermandois, a natural son of Louis XIV. The pantomime, unlike Dumas' romance, ends with the prisoner's escape and a general reconciliation. In *la Forêt noire*, a child-actor plays the leading rôle of a six-year old lad, who, after having been kidnapped by thieves, converts his captors and then persuades his parents to abandon the idea of punishing them. Infantile actors were no novelty at the *Ambigu-Comique* which, as we have already seen, possessed at one time no adult actors, but here in *la Forêt noire* the character of the child begins to assume the important rôle of the innocent victim and the conciliator of enemies which he later occupied in so many of the melodramas.<sup>1</sup> In *le Vétéran ou le bûcheron déserteur* (1786) the plot is similar to that of *le Maréchal-des-logis*; Saint-Aman, a deserter, who has taken the disguise of a wood-cutter, saves Elize from robbers and Elize in return, persuades the authorities to accept his heroism in saving her as an atonement for his desertion.

Arnould continued to write pantomimes similar to these until his death in 1795 when he left as an heritage to the theater for which he had worked so hard a large number of pantomimes and comedies mixed with vaudeville.<sup>2</sup> Although Arnould's contemporaries disliked him, they did not fail to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. chap. II.

<sup>2</sup> A partial list of his works is given in Michaud's *Biographie générale* and in the manuscript *Dictionnaire des ouvrages dramatiques* of Henri Duval, now at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

ascribe the success of pantomime at the *Ambigu-Comique* to his zeal and intelligence and also to the careful training of his actors. Arnould prepared the way for the greatest of the melodramatists, Pixérécourt; he gave pantomime a serious plot, a moral tone, and, by his attention to the staging and the costuming, made the whole as attractive as possible. He was the first author on the Boulevard to discover what were the requirements of a popular drama. During the early part of the nineteenth century, many of his pantomimes were reprinted and several were changed into melodramas by the addition of a few monologues and some dialogue. *Les quatre Fils Aymon*, for example, was given both as a pantomime and a melodrama. Pantomime in the hands of Arnould seems to have reached perfection: "Ceux qui ont vu *le Capitaine Cook, le Masque de fer*, conviendront qu'il est difficile de donner à ce genre plus de perfection."<sup>1</sup> No further development in the drama of the popular theaters was now possible, until dialogue was allowed.

These theaters of Paris obtained their long-desired liberty the 13th of January, 1791, when the National Assembly gave forth a decree which placed all the theaters of the capital on an equal footing and made them free to do as they liked. The first two articles of this decree are especially important. "Tout citoyen pourra élever un théâtre public et y faire représenter des pièces de tout genre, en faisant préalablement à l'établissement, sa déclaration à la municipalité." "Les ouvrages des auteurs morts depuis cinq ans et plus sont une propriété publique et peuvent, non-obstant tous les anciens privilèges, qui sont abolis, être représentés sur les théâtres, indistinctement."<sup>2</sup> When the news of the passage of this decree reached the Boulevard, there was much rejoicing over this severe blow dealt the *Comédie-Française*. At the *Théâtre des Délassements-Comiques* the curtain, which the authorities

<sup>1</sup> *Almanach des spectacles*, 1792.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Albert, M., *les Théâtres des Boulevards*, p. 67.

required to be hung between the audience and the actors, was joyfully torn down. This rejoicing did not last long, because the small theaters soon discovered that complete liberty had its disadvantages. With the rapid increase in the number of theaters, competition became so keen that even the oldest houses on the Boulevard were unable to open their doors every day. The small theaters also soon found their newly acquired liberty was more apparent than real and that, to be allowed to remain open, they must play very skilfully the part of the political turncoat. The directors of the changing government of France at that time were often more tyrannical than the *Comédie-Française*. The position of the theaters in times of revolution is always precarious. "Du reste, l'histoire de tous les théâtres est le même dans les temps de révolution. Le moyen d'être calme avec la fièvre." In 1793 the National Convention decided to use the theaters for the purposes of political propaganda. "La convention nationale a décrété dans sa séance d'avant hier: 1° qu'à compter du 4 du mois présent jusqu'au premier septembre prochain, il sera donné trois fois par semaine sur les théâtres désignés par la municipalité, des pièces qui font aimer la liberté, comme *Gaius Gracchus*, *Brutus*, *Guillaume Tell*, et aux frais de la République; 2° que tout théâtre où il sera donné des pièces tendant à corrompre l'esprit public, à ramener à l'amour de la royauté, sera fermé et les propriétaires arrêtés." The narrow interpretation which was placed upon the second clause in this decree sometimes gave the managers of the small theaters much trouble but, in spite of this political censorship, and of the competition even, the managers felt they had gained a great deal when they became free to use dialogue.

Previous to the Revolution, the small theaters had been very little concerned about the political condition of the country, but after 1789 no form of the drama could remain uninfluenced by the great political upheaval of the time. The *Comédie-Française* suffered more than any other theater in the capital. After losing all its privileges the troupe broke up into two



factions, the *rouges* and the *noirs*. The members of the latter, the more conservative group, were cast into prison because of a harmless performance of *Paméla*, August 29, 1794, and Collot d'Herbois' prophecy, 'la tête de la *Comédie-Française* sera guillotinée et le reste déporté,' was about to be fulfilled when Robespierre fell. The condition of anarchy which reigned in the drama during the Revolution is thus described by two contemporaries: "Les ouvrages révolutionnaires joués sur les théâtres, peuvent être regardés comme les thermomètres de l'esprit, qui animait le gouvernement d'alors, aussi, à mesure que nous approchons de ces temps malheureux, qui ont étendu un crêpe sanglant sur la France, l'oubli de toutes les affections les plus douces règnera dans la plupart des ouvrages de ces circonstances, dont nous serons obligés de parler, quoi qu'il nous en coûte pour surmonter le dégoût que nous éprouverons en fouillant dans cet amas impur d'abominations."<sup>1</sup> Plays such as *le Couvent*, *les Victimes cloîtrées*, *Encore un curé*, *l'Epoux républicain*, *la Papesse Jeanne*, show by their very titles that the drama had become a most servile handmaid to politics. After the ninth of Thermidor, *l'Intérieur des comités révolutionnaires*, *le Souper des Jacobins*, *les Assemblées primaires* exposed the abuses of the Directory but made no advance in literary form. This unfortunate condition of the *Comédie-Française* as a forum for the discussion of political ideas came to an end May 31, 1799, when the two sections of the troupe united again and gave at the first performance the *Cid* and *l'Ecole des maris*. The eighteenth of Brumaire was a turning point in the history of the *Comédie-Française*, because Napoleon was not only fond of classical tragedy but also anxious to restore to this venerable theater its primitive glory.<sup>2</sup> With

<sup>1</sup> Martainville et Etienne, *l'Histoire du Théâtre-Français pendant la Révolution*, (Paris, 1802): vol. III, p. 20. Cf. Welschinger, H., *Théâtre de la Révolution*, (Paris, 1877); Moland, L., *Théâtre de la Révolution*, (Paris, 1880); Pougin, *la Comédie-Française et la Révolution* (Paris, s. d.).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Muret, Th., *Histoire par le théâtre*, vol. I, p. 233. "Lorsqu' une partie de la *Comédie-Française* alla jouer à Erfurt, en septembre et octo-

the ascendancy of Napoleon, the *Comédie-Française* began to recover its ancient privileges and finally June 12, 1803, entered the service of the emperor with a performance of *Esther* at Saint-Cloud to which all the ministers and ambassadors of the Court were invited. Henceforth the troupe was much better off than it had been for over half a century previous. In spite of the many vicissitudes through which both the country and the theater had passed, the plays at the *Comédie-Française* differed in no respect from those before the Revolution; the emperor brought back into favor the masterpieces of the seventeenth century and encouraged the writing of new tragedies and comedies along orthodox and traditional lines. The Revolution, with all its dramatic possibilities, its color, excitement, and violent changes of fortunes, was not utilized for the purposes of the drama. "Le drame et l'épopée qui étaient partout sauf dans la littérature" perhaps needed none of the embellishments of poetry and the stage.

The popular theaters, on the contrary, felt the influence of the Revolution very deeply. First of all, the people who frequented them were in a state of constant excitement and hysteria and so accustomed to scenes of horror and bloodshed in the streets of Paris that they demanded a drama full of terror and blood-curdling incidents. Even in the midst of these awe-inspiring plays, contemporary theatrical newspapers raised a cry of protest. "On se plaignait avant la Révolution, du ravage qui causoit, dans l'art dramatique, l'amour exclusif des choses exagérées; c'est bien pis aujourd'hui que toutes nos idées sont à l'esprit de vin, et que, depuis le matin jusqu'au soir, nous sommes dans une irritation perpétuelle au physique comme au moral. Des prisons, des cimetières, des lampes sépulchrales, des cris funèbres, du sang, des échafauds; voilà ce qu'on offre pour nous distraire de nos douleurs et de nos

bre, 1808, voici quels ouvrages y furent représentés: *Cinna*, *Andromaque*, *Mithridate*, *Iphigénie en Aulide*, *Zaire*, *Britannicus*, *Oedipe*, *Rhadamiste*, *Rodogune*, *Mahomet*, *le Cid*, *Bajazet*, *Horace*, *Manlius*, *Phèdre*. Certes, on ne saurait trop approuver, chez Napoléon, ce goût du grand et du beau."

chagrins. Il sembleroit que les auteurs eussent conjuré avec les factieux pour nous tenir sans cesse dans un état d'agitation, d'angoisse ou de fureur." <sup>1</sup> Even the titles of the plays which were then being given on the Boulevard, *Frédégilde ou le démon familier*, *Blanco ou l'homme invisible*, *l'Enfant du mystère*, *le Moine terminé par l'enfer de Milton* furnish some proof that the following description was not without some foundation: "Des diables ou des voleurs, des voleurs ou des diables et souvent même tous les deux ensemble; telle est en peu de mots l'histoire actuelle des petits théâtres de Paris et même de quelques-uns des grands, où ce détestable goût commence à pénétrer." <sup>2</sup> The mind of the populace of Paris was in such an abnormal state that the desire for the strange and the peculiar, for stories of devils, ghosts, and imps in the midst of scenes of battle and murder, seemed insatiable. Even the acting was exaggerated and realistic. According to *le Courrier des spectacles* a performance of *la Forêt périlleuse* was almost completely interrupted by women, who, frightened at the sight of so much bloodshed, began to scream and leave the theater.

While the people and the nation were in this morbid state, craving for strong and thrilling sensations they found certain kinds of contemporary foreign literature congenial reading. Both England and Germany, in their literatures, if not in their governments, showed radical and revolutionary tendencies. The influence of the literatures of these two countries will be discussed in a separate chapter but for the sake of continuity a brief mention must now be made of this influence. From Germany came Schiller's *Räuber*, a play teeming with revolt against society and convention; which, in Lamartellière's translation, was successful for a long time after its initial performance at the *Théâtre du Marais* in 1792. During the last half of the eighteenth century, there had arisen in England a school of novelists of the extreme romantic type; Horace Walpole and his successors, Ann Radcliffe and Lewis, had catered

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des théâtres*, March 6, 1792.

<sup>2</sup> *Melpomène et Thalie vengées*, an VII, p. 22.

to a very numerous class of readers who never tired of lengthy and absurd fictions about monks, nuns, robbers, ghosts, and haunted castles. France soon acquired a liking for these highly colored novels, which, after being translated and published in large editions, were dramatized for the use of the small theaters. Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Lewis' *Monk* were all turned into effective plays. The *Journal des Débats* described *Victor ou l'enfant de la forêt*, a play of this extreme romantic type, as, "un drame sombre, horrible, diabolique, fantomique, en un mot, l'encyclopédie de tous nos drames muets."<sup>1</sup> When political conditions became more normal this exaggerated romanticism began to disappear, and long before Hugo's Spanish bandit came upon the stage of the *Comédie-Française*, the popular theaters had adopted almost exclusively historical and domestic subjects for their plays.

The form of these popular plays at the time of the Revolution varied greatly. The most common type closely resembled the pantomime of Arnould, the only difference being the use of dialogue. The term, *pantomime dialoguée*, which was current at this time explained exactly this new popular drama. Fabien Pillet, who was especially bitter against the small theaters, attacked both the name and the genre. A pantomime with dialogue by Cuvelier entitled *C'est le diable ou la bohémienne* was thus criticised by him: "Je demanderais à l'auteur, si je le connaissais, ce que c'est qu'une pantomime dialoguée: il me répondrait sans doute: c'est le diable. Je lui pourrais objecter qu'une pantomime dialoguée n'est ni une pièce ni une pantomime, mais une espèce de monstre. Il me répliquerait peut-être: que m'importe? J'attire la foule, j'ai réussi. Il pourrait avoir raison; mais à coup sûr je n'aurais pas tort."<sup>2</sup> Most of the *pantomimes dialoguées* deserved equally severe criticism but, in one respect, as Pillet himself admitted, they

<sup>1</sup> Year VIII, 5 prairial.

<sup>2</sup> *Melpomène et Thalie vengées*, an VII, p. 67.



were worthy of notice. “ *L’Enfant du malheur*, pantomime qui fait courir tout Paris, et du succès de laquelle je ne suis pas étonné après l’avoir vue. Ce n’est pas qu’elle mérite par elle-même, car il n’y a pas de sens commun, comme il est d’usage dans toutes les pantomimes des Boulevards; mais elle plaît par ses accessoires, le nombre et l’éclat de ses décorations, et en général par la manière dont elle est exécutée. Il est une vérité dont il faut convenir, c’est que les petits spectacles sont infiniment supérieurs aux grands dans le soin qu’ils apportent dans les représentations dramatiques qu’ils donnent; ils respectent le public pour accaparer de son argent au lieu que les autres comédiens veulent avoir l’argent du public, sans se mettre en peine de le satisfaire; ils crient à l’injustice quand, rebuté par leur mesquinerie, il les abandonne, tandis qu’ils ne devraient s’en prendre qu’à eux seuls de son indifférence.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the earliest and most interesting examples of *pantomime dialoguée* is the *Baron de Trenck* of Mayeur de Saint-Paul, which was first produced several years before the beginning of the Revolution. The fact that this pantomime with dialogue was given at a time when the small theaters were not allowed to use dialogue is somewhat difficult to explain. First of all, the *Baron de Trenck* is probably a unique example of the use of dialogue in pantomime before 1791 and then it must be noted that it was so written that it could easily be given without the use of spoken words and still be intelligible to the audience. It was probably played at a time when the authorities were receiving bribes from the popular theaters and so the use of dialogue was permitted. The preface of Mayeur de Saint-Paul is worthy of citation, not only because in it the dramatist explains how he happened to write a *pantomime dialoguée* but also because his statements regarding the origin of this hybrid genre bear such a resemblance to those of Pixérécourt concerning the beginning of melodrama. The first pre-occupation

<sup>1</sup> *Vérité à l’ordre du jour*, an VI, p. 58.

of Mayeur de Saint-Paul, as of the majority of French dramatists even to the present day, was the question of the unities. "J'ai bien vu que je ne pouvais conserver les règles qu'impose Aristote, qu'il falloit me priver des trois unités. Alors je me suis trouvé arrêté. Mais réfléchissant que nos meilleurs auteurs lyriques avoient souvent réussi en secouant ce joug, et enhardi par leur exemple, j'ai travaillé; et nombre de nos lecteurs verront aisément au rythme de mes vers et à la faiblesse du style, que cette pièce étoit destinée à être mise en musique. Mais un léger inconvénient m'ayant empêché de faire représenter mon ouvrage sur un des premiers théâtres de la capitale (dont j'ai tant à me louer de l'honnêteté des premiers sujets), je me suis décidé à la faire jouer sur un théâtre subalterne, où j'ai dû, en partie, mon succès au jeu de l'acteur chargé du rôle de Baron de Trenck."<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the dialogue Mayeur de Saint-Paul's pantomime differs in no respect from the historical pantomime of Arnould. The plot is simple, the number of acts three, the ending happy, and the moral lesson prominent. Mayeur de Saint-Paul states in his preface that his first object is to put upon the stage a picture of *la vertu souffrante et malheureuse*, which finally overcomes all difficulties. The subject of the pantomime is a conspiracy against the Baron de Trenck. He is cast into prison because of the false accusation of Colonel Thinski but soon is able to escape by the aid of two faithful soldiers. In the end the innocence of the hero is established and after a general reconciliation the play ends as usual with drills and dances. A short passage from the third act will illustrate the manner in which Mayeur de Saint-Paul interrupted the dialogue by music.

"Trenck,

Ce bien de mon roi me devient plus flatteur  
Depuis que l'amitié partage mon bonheur.

Air: *Déjà la trompette guerrière*

(8 mesures).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. chap. II; Pixérécourt's account of the origin of the melodrama.

Qu'il est doux pour un guerrier  
 Brûlant de l'amour de la gloire  
 De cueillir un beau laurier  
 Dans les champs de la victoire.

---

(7 mesures).

*Tristen,*

Sa valeur est son bouclier  
 Son nom vit dans la mémoire.

---

(4 mesures).

*Thinski (à part),*

Il ignore la tempête  
 Que je dirige contre lui;  
 Si le roi me croit aujourd'hui  
 Elle éclatera sur sa tête

---

(8 mesures).

The author intended that the actors should carry on a pantomime during the musical interludes. For the music, sometimes well-known airs were designated, sometimes only the nature of the music was suggested as, for example, 'un air de combat,' 'une musique brillante,' 'air d'action,' or 'sur un air qui peint la félicité générale.' The interruptions of the dialogues were so numerous that the action must have been carried on almost exclusively by pantomime. The *Baron de Trenck* was given at the *Ambigu-Comique* for the greater part of a year and became almost as famous on the Boulevard as the *Maréchal-des-logis*. Mayeur de Saint-Paul's experiment of combining dialogue and pantomime, however, was a failure for the time being, because no play similar to the *Baron de Trenck* was seen on the Boulevard until after 1791.

In the newspapers and theatrical almanachs of the period the *Baron de Trenck* is spoken of either as a pantomime or a *pièce dramatique*. The *Ambigu-Comique* advertised it as a pantomime because it did not wish to call the attention of the authorities to the use of dialogue. After 1791 any pantomime in which dialogue was used was spoken of as a *pantomime dialoguée*, an awkward and self-contradictory term, which

shortly after 1800 was replaced by the word, *mélodrame*. For the first few years of the nineteenth century both terms were used simultaneously, as for example in a theatrical almanach for 1802 where a critic writes: "J'ai vu douze pantomimes dialoguées, appelées mélodrames."<sup>1</sup> Before 1800 *mélodrame* was used sporadically in the sense of pantomime with dialogue. Moline was perhaps the first to use the word in this sense in his *Michelin ou l'humanité récompensée, mélodrame en un acte* (1790) but since this so-called melodrama was not played except in a small town of Brittany, his use of the word was not generally known. Another use of the word is found in Rosny and de la Rochelle's *Adonis ou le bon nègre, mélodrame en 4 actes*, year VI. Since we may regard these two instances of *mélodrame* being used for *pantomime dialoguée* before 1800 as exceptional, and since we know that *mélodrame* had acquired its new meaning by the year 1802, we can date the change of the name of popular drama during 1800 and 1801. To explain why the word *mélodrame* was adopted, it will be necessary to trace the history of this word during the eighteenth century.

## 2. THE 'scène lyrique.'

During the last few decades of the eighteenth century *mélodrame* was a synonym for *scène lyrique*. Like pantomime with dialogue, the *scène lyrique* was a combination of instrumental music and spoken words. Rousseau's *Pygmalion* is the only successful example of the genre in France. Popular manuals and encyclopedias have often stated that *Pygmalion* was the beginning of popular melodrama. Even Geoffroy, in his hatred for the Genevan philosopher, claimed that the decadence in the drama might be traced to the author of *le Contrat social*. "Tout le monde connaît la scène de *Pygmalion*, premier germe de nos mélodrames. Qui l'eût cru que ces tragédies des Boule-

<sup>1</sup> *Coup de fouet ou revue de tous les théâtres de Paris*, 1802, p. 42. Cf. *Année théâtrale*, 1803: "force grandes pantomimes ou, comme on les appelle aujourd'hui, des mélodrames."



vards avoient pour père un aussi fameux philosophe que Jean-Jacques Rousseau?"<sup>1</sup> An examination of *Pygmalion* and the few feeble imitations of it will readily show how little responsible Rousseau is for the melodrama. It is possible that Mayeur de Saint-Paul in the *Baron de Trenck*<sup>2</sup> and Moline in *Michelin*<sup>3</sup> were consciously or unconsciously imitating *Pygmalion*, although neither of them mentioned Rousseau, but it is quite certain that the *scène lyrique*, after it had received the name, *mélodrame*, disappeared and the name was then passed on to *pantomime dialoguée*.

Rousseau wrote *Pygmalion* under the following circumstances. About the middle of the eighteenth century a quarrel arose in Paris as to the respective merits of French and Italian music. Since French opera had apparently failed, it was urged that France should abandon the idea of a national opera and adopt the music of Italy. At first Rousseau seemed to favor a national school of French opera, and wrote the words and music of his *Devin du village* (1752) as a convincing argument against the adoption of Italian opera. This work was a success and he himself seemed pleased with the praise of the critics and the generous reward which the king and the queen bestowed upon him after they had heard the opera. Then, with one of those abrupt and apparently inconsistent changes so frequent in his life, he abandoned the idea of national opera and, in the same year, in which he wrote *le Devin du village*, published in his *Lettre sur la musique française* an abusive attack upon French opera, which he contended was impossible of development because the French language, when sung, was harsh and disagreeable. "Je crois notre langue peu propre à la poésie et point du tout à la musique." Later in his *Observations sur l'Alceste de M. Gluck* he expressed the same views: "Persuadé que la langue française, déstituée de tout accent, n'est nullement propre à la musique et principalement au récitatif, j'ai imaginé un genre de drame, dans lequel les paroles et la musique, au

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Débats*, Aug. 28, 1805.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. p. 25.

lieu de marcher ensemble, se font entendre successivement, et où la phrase parlée est en quelque sorte annoncée et préparée par la phrase musicale. La scène de *Pygmalion* est un exemple de ce genre qui n'a pas eu d'imitateurs. En perfectionnant cette méthode, on réunirait le double avantage de soulager l'acteur par de fréquents repos, et d'offrir au spectateur français l'espèce de mélodrame le plus convenable à sa langue. Cette réunion de l'art déclamatoire avec l'art musical ne produira qu'imparfaitement tous les effets du vrai récitatif, et les oreilles délicates s'apercevront désagréablement du contraste qui règne entre le langage de l'acteur et celui de l'orchestre qui l'accompagne, mais un acteur sensible et intelligent, en rapprochant le ton de sa voix et l'accent de sa déclamation de ce qu'exprime le trait musical, mêle ces couleurs étrangères avec tant d'art, que le spectateur n'en peut discerner les nuances. Ainsi cette espèce d'ouvrage pourrait constituer un genre moyen entre la simple déclamation et le véritable mélodrame, dont il n'atteindra jamais la beauté." <sup>1</sup>

*Pygmalion*, this first attempt at reforming French opera, was written by Rousseau in 1762. At first it was performed in the drawing-rooms of his friends and did not become generally known until after he wrote his *Observations sur l'Alceste de M. Gluck*. It consists of a monologue which is frequently interrupted by instrumental music. The subject is the animation of the statue of Galatea at the prayer of Pygmalion.<sup>2</sup> The scene is laid in the sculptor's studio, where, in the midst of tools, marbles, and statues, is the beautiful statue of Galatea. After the Sculptor's rapturous monologue, the miracle takes place and Galatea utters a few words. At the pauses in the monologue, the actor expressed his feelings and his state of mind by means of pantomime to the accompaniment of the orchestra. For example, after the overture and several interludes by the orchestra, Pygmalion beseeches the goddess of love

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres complètes de Rousseau*, (ed., H. Furet, Paris) 1826; Vol. XIV, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, x.

to animate his masterpiece, to give it both a living body and a soul. "Oui, deux êtres manquent à la plénitude des choses; partage-leur cette ardeur dévorante qui consume l'un sans animer l'autre: c'est toi qui formas par ma main ces charmes et ces traits qui n'attendent que le sentiment et la vie; donne-lui la moitié de la mienne, donne-lui tout, s'il le faut, il me suffira de vivre en elle . . . Déesse de la beauté, épargne cet affront à la nature qu'un si parfait modèle soit l'image de ce qui n'est pas." Then follows an interlude by the orchestra, while the actor goes through a pantomime. Pygmalion, who with mallet and chisel in hand is about to make an alteration in the statue, suddenly stops as he feels a vibration in the marble.

"Quel tremblement! quel trouble! Je tiens le ciseau d'une main mal assurée . . . je ne puis . . . je n'ose . . . je gâterai tout.

[Il s'encourage; et enfin, présentant son ciseau, il en donne un seul coup, et, saisi d'effroi, il le laisse tomber en poussant un grand cri.]

Dieux, je sens la chair palpitante repousser le ciseau! . . .

[Il redescend tremblant et confus.]

Vaine terreur, fol aveuglement . . . Non . . . je n'y toucherai point; les dieux m'épouvantent. Sans doute, elle est déjà consacrée à leur rang.

[Il la considère de nouveau.]

Que veux-tu changer? regarde! quels nouveaux charmes veux-tu lui donner? Ah, c'est sa perfection, qui fait son défaut. Divine Galathée, moins parfaite, il ne te manquerait rien.

[Tendrement.]

Mais il te manque une âme; ta figure ne peut s'en passer.

[Avec plus d'attendrissement encore.]

Que l'âme faite pour animer un tel corps doit être belle."

At length the statue says, "Moi" and the orchestral interlude portrays the surprise and consternation of the sculptor. "C'est moi," continues Galatea and then in hesitation she questions her existence, "Ce n'est pas moi." Pygmalion, rushing toward her, covers her with kisses and she again exclaims, "Ah,

encore moi." When the orchestra has expressed the happiness of these two united beings, Pygmalion closes the scene with the words, "Oui, cher et charmant objet; oui, digne chef-d'œuvre de mes mains, de mon cœur et des dieux; c'est toi, c'est toi seule: je t'ai donné tout mon être: je ne vivrai plus que par toi." When *Pygmalion* was given at Weimar in 1772 a series of interludes was specially written for it by Aspelmeier but at the *Comédie-Française* the *andante* movement of the overture and the first interlude were composed by Rousseau himself and the rest by a merchant of Lyons named Coignet.<sup>1</sup> By this combination of words and music Rousseau believed that he had approached that union of words and music which the Greeks called, *μελοποιία*. As the merchant Coignet explained in a letter to the *Mercure de France*, "M. Rousseau vouloit donner, par ce spectacle, une idée de la Mélopée des Grecs, de leur ancienne déclamation théâtrale; il désiroit que la Musique fût expressive, qu'elle peignît la situation, et, pour ainsi dire, le genre d'affection que ressentait l'Acteur."

When Rousseau wrote *Pygmalion* in 1762, he was so enthusiastic about it that he almost sent a copy of it to the Italian poet, Metastasio, whom he greatly admired, but this enthusiasm soon turned into complete indifference. Paris did not see a performance of this *scène lyrique* until fifteen years after its composition. In 1770 it attracted some attention because of an amateur performance of it in Lyons. Goethe, who heard the work at Weimar in 1772, believed it was destined to revolutionize opera. "Und so will ich denn auch noch eines kleinen, merkwürdig Epoche machenden Werkes gedenken: es ist Rousseau's „Pygmalion." Vieles könnte man darüber sagen."<sup>2</sup> Before the initial performance at the *Comédie-Française* Rousseau acted in a strange manner. At first he complained that it was to be given without his consent but, when he was waited upon by a delegation from the *Comédie-Française*, he refused

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the very able work, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau als Komponist seiner lyrischen Scene*, „*Pygmalion*," by Edgar Istel, Leipzig, 1901.

<sup>2</sup> *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, III, 11.



to see Larive, who was at the head of the delegation and who was to play the title rôle, and merely shouted through the key-hole, "Faites comme vous voudrez, je ne m'en mêle pas: je vous préviens seulement qu'il y a dans l'ouvrage une sottise; je ne la corrigerai pas."<sup>1</sup> In spite of this protest, which was actuated either by his sincere conviction that the *scène lyrique* was a failure or merely by a momentary whim of his changeable disposition, *Pygmalion* was favorably received in Paris. "Les Comédiens François ont donné le lundi, 30 octobre, la première représentation de *Pygmalion*, écrite avec chaleur, rendue supérieurement par M. Larive, jouant Pygmalion et Mlle. Raucourt, représentant la statue de Galatée, qui a beaucoup réussi . . . Une musique analogue aux sentiments de l'artiste remplit les intervalles de sa déclamation et la fortifie. C'est un genre nouveau où l'orchestre représente alternativement avec l'acteur et dans lequel l'un et l'autre font tour-à-tour pantomime; cela peut donner l'idée, à ce qu'on prétend, de la *Mélopée* des Grecs et de leur déclamation théâtrale. Au moins c'est un genre qui peut varier les plaisirs du théâtre."<sup>2</sup> A still more favorable account is found in *les Mémoires de Bachaumont*: "Pygmalion est une seule scène en prose très accentuée: c'est un monologue très chaud, où cet artiste fameux développe la vivacité de ses sentiments pour la statue. La scène a fait la plus grande sensation: on peut la regarder comme un petit chef-d'œuvre dont il faudrait cependant supprimer quelques idées trop abstraites, quelques expressions sentant trop l'école et le dialecticien."<sup>3</sup> Grimm, in spite of his enmity toward Rousseau, praised *Pygmalion*, but La Harpe spoke of it as "un long monologue plein de déclamation et de métaphysique et dont le sujet est un délire continuel qui finit par un miracle." Geoffroy in 1802 stigmatized the work as "un amas d'apostrophes, d'exclamations, d'interrogations, de répétitions, un

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Geoffroy, *Cours de littérature dramatique*, Paris, 1825, vol. III, p. 532.

<sup>2</sup> *Mercure de France*, November, 1775.

<sup>3</sup> *Mémoires secrets*, London, 1777, vol. VIII, p. 267.

véritable arsenal de toutes les figures de rhétorique.”<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding these adverse criticisms *Pygmalion* remained in the repertory of the *Comédie-Française* until 1816.

Rousseau in the passage quoted above from *les Observations sur l'Alceste de M. Gluck*,<sup>2</sup> mentioned that *Pygmalion* had not been imitated by any of his contemporaries and at the date of the letter, 1774, he apparently regretted his failure to revolutionize French opera. After his death, however, Paris saw a second *scène lyrique* in Benda's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which was given at the Italian Opera in 1781. Georg Benda, a German composer of little importance, had gained some celebrity in his own country on account of musical interludes which he was accustomed to write for works similar to *Pygmalion*. Rousseau was apparently ignorant of Benda's work along these lines, although some of the *scènes lyriques* of the latter had become well-known in Germany before *Pygmalion* was given in Paris. Benda's wife, who created the leading rôles in all of his works, possessed that rare ability of harmonizing the tones of her speaking voice with the musical interludes. Benda's fame, due in most part to these histrionic talents of his wife, spread to Paris and after many refusals he finally consented to go there and superintend the production in French of his masterpiece, *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The plot of this work, like that of *Pygmalion*, is drawn from classical mythology but it is somewhat longer and is divided into scenes. The first scene consists of a monologue by Theseus, who, as he beholds the sleeping Ariadne, regrets that he must leave her a prey to the Greeks, the second scene is Ariadne's monologue of despair over the absence of her lover, and the third scene contains the announcement by the voice of an Oread from behind the scenes of the desertion of Theseus. The play ends with Ariadne's casting herself into the sea. Although much more dramatic than *Pygmalion*, *Ariadne auf Naxos* was not

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Débats*, 7 vendémaire, an 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. p. 26.

a success, when given in French. The *Mercure de France* praised the music of Benda but criticized the translation of the German text: "Ce n'est pas ainsi que l'immortel Citoyen a écrit son *Pygmalion*. Quel feu! quelle vigueur! quelle énergie dans ses manières d'écrire."<sup>1</sup> In 1783 Larive, inspired by his success in the title role of *Pygmalion*, tried to revive the *scène lyrique* with his *Pyrame et Thisbé*, which was withdrawn, however, after a few performances at the *Comédie-Française*. After Larive's failure there appeared an occasional *scène lyrique* written by some admirer of Rousseau or some musical amateur eager to reform French opera, but as a distinct genre it disappeared.

Returning to the statement that Rousseau was the father of the melodrama, in the signification of popular drama, we can easily see how erroneous it is. Besides the fact that this genre of the *scène lyrique* was a failure and that only one work, *Pygmalion*, had any success at all, it must be admitted that there were no popular elements in works such as *Pygmalion* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The *scène lyrique* appealed to a very limited number of appreciative musicians but to the general public it seemed a form of drama midway between opera and tragedy, with the faults of both and none of the excellent qualities of either. First of all the ideal actor, 'un acteur sensible et intelligent'<sup>2</sup> of whom Rousseau wrote, was extremely difficult to find, because few actors were able to place the tones of their speaking voice in such a manner as to avoid discords with the instrumental music. Furthermore the separation of the words and music caused the plot to drag; at each musical interlude the action of the plot was interrupted, because the orchestra did nothing more than express through the medium of music, the words spoken by the actor. Benda, after his return to Germany in 1781, recognized how much this repetition injured the artistic effect, and so began to use the spoken words and the music simultaneously rather than alternatively.

<sup>1</sup> July 20, 1781.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. p. 27.

In this form the *scène lyrique* became very successful in Germany, where we find many notable examples of it, as, for example, in certain of the operas of Mozart and Beethoven <sup>1</sup> and in several scenes of Mendelssohn's incidental music for *Midsummer Night's Dream*. More recently Strauss has revived the genre in his *Enoch Arden*. In France a revival of the genre is to be found in the so-called *adaptations musicales*, which are musical accompaniments to the recitation of poems, especially those of Verlaine and Musset. In England and Germany these *scènes lyriques*, or *adaptations musicales*, are called melodramas. The history of this word melodrama, will show why Rousseau's name has been associated with popular drama.

Rousseau had used the term, *scène lyrique*, probably through analogy with *tragédie lyrique*, which his contemporaries often applied to opera. Dubois,<sup>2</sup> the translator of the German text of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, had suggested in his preface the substitution of *mélodrame* for *scène lyrique*: "Nous n'ignorons pas que le mot Mélodrame peut s'appliquer à toutes les productions dramatiques qui ont besoin du secours de la musique: mais comme on n'a pas imaginé d'expression propre au nouveau genre dont il est ici question, nous avons préféré d'employer un terme déjà connu, et qui, d'ailleurs, n'est guère en usage pour désigner les autres productions dramatico-musicales. C'est ainsi qu'on est convenu d'appeler Drame, les pièces larmoyantes, qui ne peuvent être nommées, ni Tragédies, ni Comédies, quoique le mot drame soit applicable à toutes les pièces de Théâtre." Dubois' suggestion was apparently accepted because both Grimm and the *Mercur de France* spoke of *Ariadne auf Naxos* as a *mélodrame*. Istel<sup>3</sup> is inclined to think Rousseau

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the grave-digging scene in *Fidelio*, the dream scene in *Egmont*, and the incantation scene in *die Freischütz*.

<sup>2</sup> The preface to this translation of *Ariadne auf Naxos* is signed J. B. D. B., which, according to Barbier (*Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes*), are the initials of Dubois.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, appendix I, 70.



may have intended to use *mélodrame* in the sense of *scène lyrique*, although he is unable to point out any passage as conclusive proof of this intention. In Rousseau's *Dictionnaire de musique*, *mélodrame* is frequently used but always in the meaning of opera, a signification which was borrowed from the Italian *melodramma* at the time when Rousseau and his adversaries were discussing the merits of French and Italian music. For example, a pamphlet published in 1772 bore the title, *Traité du mélodrame ou réflexions sur la musique dramatique* in which *mélodrame* means dramatic music in general. Istel points to the passage quoted above<sup>1</sup> from *les Observations sur l'Alceste de M. Gluck* as the first use of the word melodrama for a lyric scene,<sup>2</sup> but he was misled into making this hypothesis because he was unacquainted with the preface of Dubois.<sup>3</sup> Since there is no instance of the use of the word, *mélodrame*, in any sense other than that of opera before 1781, and since Dubois made a definite statement concerning the new meaning which he wished to give to the word when he translated *Ariadne auf Naxos*, we may be certain that *mélodrame* acquired the signification of *scène lyrique* in 1781.

A year later a musical amateur named Martineau proposed to differentiate the two terms by restricting the use of *scène lyrique* to monologues and *mélodrame* to dialogues. As Martineau made this proposal in the preface to his *Ariane*, a short *mélodrame* which he printed privately and which was never produced, he attracted no attention to this distinction in the meaning of the two terms. After 1781 *scène lyrique* and *mélodrame* became synonymous; both *Pygmalion* and *Ariadne auf Naxos* were referred to indifferently as the one or the other.

<sup>1</sup> P. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, appendix I, 70: "Ich glaube nicht fehl zu gehen, wenn ich in dieser aus den *Observations* citierten Stelle den Anlass zu dem Entstehen der neuen dem Worte 'Melodrama' bis dahin fremden Bedeutung, die in der Folge dann seine einzige wurde, sehe."

<sup>3</sup> Dubois' translation is to be found at the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (*Recueil d'opéras français*, fr. 19560) but is not noted in the general catalogue either under the name of Benda or Dubois.

Larive's *Pyrame et Thisbé* likewise is mentioned in the *Almanach des théâtres pour l'année 1787* on page 99 as a *scène lyrique* and on page 184 as a *mélodrame*. At the beginning of the Revolution *mélodrame* was used almost exclusively for works of the same nature as *Pygmalion*, such as Aumale de Corsenville's *Pandore* (1790) and Poulthier's *Galatée ou suite de la scène lyrique de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1795).<sup>1</sup> The *Journal des théâtres*, in speaking of *A Day in Turkey or the Russian Slave*, a play given at Covent Garden, London, during the year 1791, says: "Cette pièce est de Madame Crowley. Ce n'est point une comédie, ce n'est point un opéra; c'est ce que nous appelons un mélo-drame."<sup>2</sup> In Germany *Melodram* was used exclusively for lyric scenes after the date of Dubois' translation of *Adiadne auf Naxos* (1781). Before that, Benda had used the term, *Monodram*, for a lyric scene with one actor and *Duodram* for one with two actors. The extensive use of *Melodram* in Germany may have had some influence in spreading the use of *mélodrame* in France, because the genre attained such great success across the Rhine.

During the Revolution *mélodrame* was used for any scene in which music accompanied monologue. For example, we have the following scene from *l'Enfant du malheur ou les amans muets*, given at the *Ambigu-Comique*, year V:

Scene XI

(*mélodrame*)

Frédégonde, seule.

Qu'ai-je entendu? . . . Le perfide . . . Il me trahit . . . il m'abandonne . . . L'amour, la haine . . . luttent au fond de mon cœur . . . que dis-je, l'amour? . . . Ah, désormais, la rage seule peut régner dans mon âme . . . Eh, quoi, souffrirai-je que mon amant coule des jours heureux auprès d'une rivale adorée . . . tandis que moi . . . seule abandonnée . . . je languirais

<sup>1</sup> Copies of both these plays are to be found in the collection of plays of the period of the Revolution, which formerly belonged to Pixérécourt and which is now in the Bibliothèque du Sénat.

<sup>2</sup> December 30, 1791.

honteusement dans les bras d'une éternelle vieillesse . . . Mon art sera donc impuissant . . . l'enfer n'auroit donc plus de tortures . . . et le Ciel auroit éteint sa foudre . . . ”

The spacing in the above scene undoubtedly indicates that music was used exactly as in *Pygmalion*. In *Elviva*, another pantomime played at the *Ambigu-Comique* in the year VIII, numerous stage-directions, such as “une musique douce et plaintive se fait entendre,” “la musique exprime la douleur,” and “une musique mélodieuse se fait entendre” and several monologues which were treated in the same manner as the one quoted above from *l'Enfant du malheur* show how close the resemblance was between a pantomime with dialogue and a lyric scene. In short plays of an historical or allegorical character, as, for example, *l'Anniversaire ou la fête de la souveraineté* (1798) there were usually several scenes specially marked *mélodrame*. The music must have been important in the opinion of the authors because the stage directions often called for elaborate descriptive music. For instance, in *l'Anniversaire*, the authors asked for extraordinary music; “la musique indique le lever du soleil.”

From 1791 to 1800 there was no generally adopted term for these pantomimes with dialogues and these scenes of *mélodrame*. Cuvelier and Mittier called their *Anniversaire* mentioned above a *scène lyrique et mélodramatique*, Nougaret entitled his *Fête de travail* (year III), a *scène lyrique*, and Planterre, his *Fête de l'égalité* (year II) a *mélodrame pantomi-lyrique*. In 1798 Coffin-Rosny called his *Affrico et Menzola* a *mélodrame dialogué*, an interesting expression because it shows the transition from *pantomime dialoguée* to *mélodrame*. As soon as the word *mélodrame* became familiar to the Boulevard, authors and managers began to use it regardless of whether or not the play contained any lyric scenes similar to the one quoted from *l'Enfant du malheur*. For the small theaters *mélodrame* possessed two advantages; first, it offered a substitute for the awkward and self-contradictory *pantomime dialoguée* and secondly, it carried with it a learned connotation not unpleasing to the managers

who were trying to raise the standards of popular drama. The new word as applied to pantomime with dialogue was frequently ridiculed as in the following passage: "surtout du mélodrame, ce mot n'est ni grec ni français; son inventeur ne l'entend pas plus que nous. Nous savons que cela signifie une monstruosité dramatique, remplie d'un style souvent gigantesque, ampoulé."<sup>1</sup> The use of the word persisted in spite of ridicule and adverse criticism and after 1801 *mélodrame* was universally applied to popular drama.

In recapitulation, the following stages of development in pantomime during the last quarter of the eighteenth century may be noted. Arnould began the evolution of pantomime by the introduction of a serious plot of an historical or romanesque character. After 1791 dialogue was added to pantomime and plots were generally borrowed from the Gothic romances of England. With regard to the word *mélodrame*, there were the following changes in meaning: when first introduced into France from Italy the word was used as a synonym for opera in general; in 1781, at Dubois' suggestion, it acquired the meaning of *scène lyrique* and during the Revolution began to be applied to pantomime with dialogue.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Spectacles*, 11 frimaire, an x.





## VITA

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Born at Portland, Me., June 25, 1879, I was educated in the public schools and graduated from Harvard with the degree of A. B. in 1902. I then spent two years abroad studying at the Universities of Grenoble and Berlin. In 1907 I entered the Romance Department of Johns Hopkins University taking French as a primary subject, Italian and Spanish as first and second subordinate subjects. Since 1909 I have been instructor in Romance Languages at Cornell University.

I would express to Professors Armstrong, Ogden, Brush, Shaw, Marden, and Keidel my appreciation of their comprehensive course in Romance languages and literatures. To the late Professor Elliott I am profoundly grateful for his sympathetic guidance and encouragement in all my studies.

JAMES FREDERICK MASON.













